The Sea Boy

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The Sea Boy

by TigerPrawn

Summary

The sailor spoke in a lower tone, “It is a lucky thing to see merfolk. But remember, how you treat them decides whether that be bad luck, or good luck for ye.”

Notes

Latest installment on my @hannibalbingo card: Harpy Knife
Also for: MerMay

Hannibal Bingo

Lenny (Bleeder)	Teen Parent Will Graham	Lesbian Freddie Lounds	Armor (HEU)
Harem	Over-the-Knee Spanking	Ménage à Trois	Will's Shed
"All I need is to get one hand free"	Renaissance AU	**Free Space**	The Tree Man Tableau
"You're cute for an older guy" (Polar)	"Life didn't seem to be going his way"	A Good Finger-Wagging	Harpy Knife

Chapter 1

Hannibal had been so young when his father first taught him how to fish that it felt like he always knew. Together with some of the staff and the gamekeeper, they fished regularly on the Lecter estate, and always cooked their catch.

Whilst he remembered the excursions fondly, they fished so often that the memories became a blur. Years later only one truly would stand out in his mind, because it was one of the times they left the estate and went to the coast for a proper outing. And on this particularly memorable occasion, Hannibal had seen the sea boy.

It had been a two day trip, staying overnight in an inn near the shore, and on the first day out on a small fishing vessel, Hannibal had been mesmerised by the sight of a gloriously coloured tailfin. He had spent long hours pouring over the many volumes in his father's library on the subject of fish and other aquatic species, and this was nothing he had seen. The colour was more like that of human flesh, up to the tips which were a faint greenish-blue. And perhaps he might have thought

nothing of it and studied more once home, thinking it some exotic creature, but then he discovered it was more exotic than he had expected when a mop of dark hair surfaced.

At first he had thought it some flotsam, it was dark and threaded through with seaweed. But then a face emerged, a young boy about his age, with the same greenish-blue tinge at the end of his pointed ears and highlighting his cheeks.

Hannibal stood agape on the bow of the ship, watching as the boy watched back. They studied each other and he raised his hand in a tentative wave. The sea boy blinked at him and then his mouth split into a smile that revealed sharp, pointy teeth.

He was too mesmerised to call out to his father, and when he and the other men brought forth the small barrels of bait, the sight and sound of them must have scared the sea boy. His smile was gone, eyes wide, he continued to look at Hannibal for just a moment, then turned back into the sea, tailfin kicking up the water after him as he dove.

“Papa!” the spell between them broken, Hannibal found his voice. “Papa! I saw a boy in the sea. A boy with a fishtail!”

All the men laughed heartily and Hannibal’s father ruffled his hair. “You have a vivid imagination, Hannibal.” He chuckled.

Hannibal frowned and one of the sailors asked, “Are you sure he hasn’t been drinking the salt water.”

Another bout of laughter went up, this time a little more cruel, until there were three hard thuds on the deck and the sailors went quiet and back to their business.

Hannibal looked over to where the sound had come from and one of the sailors - an old man, much older than any of the others - sat on a low bench. He had a scar across his face, a pipe in his mouth and had knocked on the deck with a large stick that he used for walking.

“You ignore these fools,” The old sailor told Hannibal. “These waters are filled with all manner of things that sailors should fear. Them things of this world, and of others.” He raised his voice so the other sailors had to hear him. “They’d all do well to be more mindful of the sea.”

There were a few grumbles under their breath but no one spoke directly to the old man, who then grabbed Hannibal by the back of his collar and pulled him closer, close enough that his nose was filled with the scent of the damp tobacco. The sailor spoke in a lower tone, “It is a lucky thing to see merfolk. But remember, how you treat them decides whether that be bad luck, or good luck for ye.”

Hannibal swallowed and nodded, almost losing his balance when the sailor let go of him and waved him away.

That encounter might have been memorable in itself, but it was the evening that Hannibal remembered with most clarity.

It was a small fishing town they were staying in, and nowhere was far from the water. As the sailors drank and made merry in the inn, his father sat in his room going over charts with the captain, discussing the plans for the next day. No one seemed to notice that Hannibal was not in his room, and perhaps presumed him asleep. But instead, curious, he snuck out the inn and made his way

down to the harbour. He sat on the solid stone part of the pier and looked out to the water, the waves lapping a few feet beneath him - noisy in their tidal movement.

He noticed the change in sound, the slap of the waves against the stone of the wall lost rhythm. He frowned and looked down, finding the sea boy beneath him, slapping his hand against the stone to attract attention.

Hannibal took in a sharp, excited breath and immediately scrambled to lie on the floor, hanging a little over the edge to smile down at the boy.

“Hello!” Hannibal said with exuberance.

He received in return the same grin as earlier. And then the sea boy motioned with his hand, waving it to indicate Hannibal should come down and join him in the water. Hannibal wanted to, desperately, but it was dark but for the few burning street lamps, and cold. He shook his head.

“If I go in the cold water, I’ll get sick,” Hannibal said, disappointed.

The sea boy frowned sadly and let out a huff. He moved around a little, swimming in a small circle with a look of consternation, finally looking back up at Hannibal and then pointing down. Hannibal was once more going to explain that he couldn’t get in the water, when the boy turned onto his back and stretched out, floating. He was indeed the owner of the exotic tailfin, which started at his hips - a thick type of flesh, like a shark or perhaps a porpoise, not scaled like a fish.

Half way down his tail was a tangle of rope. It looked like the sort Hannibal had seen used for lobster pots, and part of it was pulled so tight that the flesh was cut open, red and raw.

“Oh!” Hannibal exclaimed as the sea boy looked back up at him. He thought for a moment whilst the boy went back to treading water beneath him. He wanted to help, and then he remembered the harpy knife he had seen on the bait barrels. Many of the sailors had them, and perhaps it was now gone, but it was worth checking.

“The boat!” Hannibal said and pointed to where it was moored along the dock. The sea boy looked at him, then the boat and back to him, then gave a smile and a nod. And with a flip of his tail he was gone again.

Hannibal got up from the floor and ran as fast as he could, weaving his way along the detritus left on the dock until he reached the ship his father had hired. All the crew were in the inn and it was entirely dark, but Hannibal had come to know it well enough during the day that he easily jumped aboard and made his way to where the bait barrels had been left on deck. The moonlight glinted on the harpy knife and Hannibal let out a triumphant hoot as he lifted it up.

There was that slapping sound again, and Hannibal looked over the bow to see the sea boy there. He thought for a moment before remembering the ramp that the smaller vessels used to get in and out of the harbour.

“The boat ramp,” he told the sea boy, his voice sounding quiet against the crash of the waves. He pointed along the harbour and his meaning was clearly taken as the boy smiled and nodded before once more disappearing beneath the waves.

Hannibal put the knife in his pocket and made his way back off the boat and onto the harbour, before he broke into a run towards the ramp. His palms were sweaty and his heart was racing. He

was thrilled at the thought of truly being able to interact with the boy.

When he reached the ramp the sea boy was already there, waiting at the bottom. He grinned again when he saw Hannibal and started to haul himself up so that the water receded behind him. Forcing himself to be cautious, Hannibal slowly made his way down the ramp, closer and closer to where the water lapped and the boy sat.

There was a lamp a little off from them, and in the light of it Hannibal could see the extraordinary muscle and tone the creature had - well defined for someone so young, it spoke of the need to be strong in the sea currents. And whilst Hannibal had been taught archery and fencing, he knew there would be no match should this boy have ill intent.

He took a breath and continued walking. Merfolk were lucky, the sailor said.

Hannibal came to a halt a foot from the sea boy and they studied each other for a long moment before Hannibal closed the distance between them and sank to his haunches.

“My name is Hannibal,” he told the boy, reaching out his hand to shake.

The boy frowned and said nothing, but he did reach out, placing his flat palm against Hannibal’s. When Hannibal closed his fingers around the cold hand to shake it, the boy took in a sharp inhale of breath and jolted, but did not pull away.

When he released the boy’s hand he frowned again and then pointed at the rope.

“Yes, I can help!” Hannibal replied enthusiastically. He took the knife from his pocket and tried to flip it open, but it was stiff and not meant for young hands. He grunted and tried his hardest, but it didn’t budge. Finally he felt cold fingers cover his again and the boy took it from his grasp.

He opened it easily, then studied it for a moment before passing it back to Hannibal.

“Th-thank you,” Hannibal’s cheeks heated, but he wasn’t sure why.

The sea boy pulled himself further up, until he was next to Hannibal, all but the very tip of his tail now out of the water. He pointed again at the rope and Hannibal nodded.

He rolled onto his front and looked over his shoulder at Hannibal, waiting expectantly. The rope cut deep into the back of his tail, and Hannibal winced. He gently pulled at the rope, each tug drawing a sharp breath from the boy.

“I’ll cut here,” Hannibal told him, placing his hand over the rope next to the wound.

The knife was sharp, and Hannibal was careful as he lifted the rope just enough to slide the knife under it. With a quick snick it was sliced, and Hannibal set the knife down. He was tentative as he then pulled the rope away from the wound. The boy grunted, his top half thrashing in pain even as he managed to keep his tail still. Closing his eyes, Hannibal tugged at the rope and suddenly it was free, pulled from the wound it had created as the boy let out a small cry. It was an easy thing then to push the rest of the rope off, leaving it in a pile at the bottom of the ramp.

“There.” Hannibal declared, “Will that be okay? Do you need ointment?”

The boy rolled back over, sitting up on his tail as though he sat on a bottom. Hannibal sat beside him, the seat of his pants becoming damp. The boy smiled at him and he was sure it was thanks.

And whilst he had done as intended, Hannibal didn't want to leave the boy just yet.

He picked up the knife to put it away, intending to return it to the boat. He tried to close it, but it was still difficult and instead the blade nicked his thumb. It wasn't a deep cut, but blood welled up all the same and Hannibal dropped the knife with a gasp.

The boy frowned at him and immediately took Hannibal's hand in his own, bringing it to his lips and sucking the thumb into his mouth. Hannibal trembled as he felt the boy's soft, cold tongue lathe over the cut before he was finally released. The blood had stopped, just a little red slice now.

He smiled at the boy and they gazed at each other for a long moment, toothy grins mirroring the other.

Before Hannibal knew what he was about, he leaned in, and the sea boy did too. Their lips met in a gentle press and Hannibal was sure he could taste his own blood.

His eyes closed, Hannibal revelled in the sensation of his first kiss.

In the far distance there was a sound, something like a conch shell being blown. And at the sound of it, the sea boy sprang backwards, his head cocked to the side and long, pointed ear twitching. When it sounded a second time he looked back to Hannibal with a forlorn expression.

With a preternatural speed, the sea boy surged forward and pressed another kiss, this time to Hannibal's cheek, and then practically slithered back into the water. At the bottom of the ramp he turned and gave a slight wave and a sad smile, before diving back under the water, his tail flicking up as goodbye.

Hannibal sighed sadly and wondered if he would see the boy again. He hoped he would, he liked the sharp-toothed smile.

Twenty Years Later

Hannibal swung down from the rigging and strode across the deck to where one of the sailors struggled to tie off the sail. He pulled the rope tight as the sailor wound it with a nod of thanks.

Once done, he leaned against the gunwale and looked out at the harbour they were leaving behind. A beautiful city to be sure, but Hannibal was glad to be sea-bound once more.

"Can't do this forever you know," came a chuckle from behind him.

Hannibal turned, greeting Captain Crawford with a grin, "How's that?" Hannibal asked, though it was a tease really.

He'd been sailing with Captain Jack Crawford for a few months every year since he had turned eighteen and his father had no longer been able to stop him. Whilst his father claimed he was raising a count not a captain, there was always an indulgent smile. The same one the benevolent captain gave him.

"You are your father's only son and heir, and soon you will have to take up that mantle in a more serious way. I'm sure he has much to teach you before he grows too old." Crawford's tone was the usual firm gentleness he had always had with Hannibal, even though he was no longer an

adolescent but a man of nearly thirty-three. “He’ll be wanting you to settle down with a wife to bear children soon enough.”

Hannibal scoffed, “I see you received a letter from my father whilst we were in port.”

Crawford’s expression turned firm, “He’s not wrong Hannibal, you can’t play at sailor forever.”

“Play? I’m just as skilled and experienced as half the men on this crew!”

Crawford was unable to hold back a smile as he shook his head and chuckled, no refuting that claim. “All the same, these waters are getting dangerous. Piracy is on the rise and they will attack any merchant vessel they think might hold valuable goods, not just those flying royal flags.”

“Pish,” Hannibal waved the comment off, “no one is going to attack this old scow.”

“Don’t you know it’s bad luck to insult the ship you are sailing on?” Jack replied, “But, all the same. I hope you’re right.”

Hannibal might have hoped the same, but he had absolute faith that pirates would never target them. A faith he realised was misplaced only three days later.

*

It was the fourth cannonball hitting the deck that sent Hannibal flying into the choppy water. Flung so far off and with the current and wind so strong, that he had no hope of climbing back aboard. With a great splinter of deck lodged in his side, all he was able to do was hold onto some bigger scrap of the deck and tread water and watch from further and further away as more of the crew were sent tumbling into the water and the ship was finally boarded by the pirates.

As night fell and the water grew colder and colder, the only thing Hannibal could see in the pitch darkness was the burning ship now miles away on the horizon.

And even that came in and out of focus as it blurred and wavered, and then everything went black and Hannibal slipped beneath the surface.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

An unexpected saviour, an unexpected reunion.

Hannibal woke with a start, drawing in a sharp breath and then crying out as pain flashed up his body. His hand went immediately to the source of the pain and found that the wooden shrapnel was no longer there, his wound dressed with the remnants of his own shirt. Strips of it wound around him, there was a patch of blood soaking through, but not excessively. That ascertained, Hannibal tried to look around him to see where he was, but it was dark and it took a moment for his eyes to adjust. He was in a cabin, a small ship's cabin and whilst he could hear water lapping, he was not moving. In fact, after a couple of months at sea, the sensation was strange and made him feel a little nauseous.

Near the sea then? In drydock? Rescued?

If he'd been picked up by the pirates - had they happened upon him and thought he might have been worth something - he would still be at sea.

Perhaps some of the crew got away and picked him up. But even then, they were over two days from the nearest port. Had he been knocked out for that long?

Swallowing down his nausea, Hannibal slowly swung his legs from the bunk and eased himself to his feet. He stumbled for a moment, needing to adjust to the stillness of the room. Hannibal leaned against the wall and looked around, his eyes now adjusted; it was still too dark to make out a great deal of detail. But he could see now the size of the space, it was much the size of the top cabin of a small fishing vessel. And as he took in the layout he wondered if that was indeed what it was. There were mismatched parts and the door that he found himself next to was not original to this cabin.

He felt for the handle and was able to open the door with some effort. It didn't quite fit in the frame and putting his shoulder to it made him grunt with pain.

When it finally swung open, Hannibal was hit with the cool air, and could see the slightest suggestion of dawn on the horizon. He drew in a deep breath and smelt the sea, and… something else. A cologne, he was sure, though one that had not aged well in the bottle.

As his eyes adjusted, Hannibal could make out that a few steps in front of him the deck ended and gave way to the sea. He was indeed in the cabin of a small vessel - or what was left of it after it had been scuttled.

He carefully walked around the cabin, a hand against the wall of it to make sure he didn't fall off the edge and into the water. As he turned the corner, he could see there was more of the vessel, and it was wedged on the rocks. Quite stable, perhaps it had been here for decades unmoving.

It took a moment for his eyes to adjust again, before Hannibal realised that he couldn't see the horizon from this side of the cabin - he was actually inside a cave. The thought brought with it panic, and he glanced back to the coming sunrise, visible through the wide cave mouth in the other direction. The tide was high, or so it seemed. He hoped so. He hoped that the relative dryness of the cabin - only the usual dampness one found at sea - indicated that he wasn't about to be washed away by the rising tide. In fact, if he had to guess, this cave was probably at the top of the water line, and when the tide recedes, he'll be completely stranded in a semi-flooded cave with the flow of the water now gone.

Perfect for smugglers. These places always were. But he couldn't think why smugglers would want to save him.

The thought raced through his mind, filling all the space within. Weighing him down until he realised that he actually had few thoughts at all. Everything was foggy. He touched his side again and barely registered the pain, everything increasingly numb. When Hannibal pulled his hand away and looked at it, there was dark, black wetness. His eyes closed even as he fought to keep them open, and then he felt himself slide down onto the deck.

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When Hannibal woke again he was back in the bed.

This time he had been entirely stripped of clothes, but when he moved his hands, he could feel blankets over him and bandages wrapped around him, over his wound.

"Wh-" he croaked, throat dry. It was only when he tried to sit up that pain went through him. Different this time though - a tightness to it. He struggled to sit and push down the blankets, revealing that indeed he had been washed, the bandages were clean, and if he had to guess just from sensation and running his hand over the bandage, he had been sewn back together.

This was surely not the work of smugglers.

It was light now, that much was clear, and Hannibal wondered what time it must be. For surely to be so bright in the cave, the sun must be shining directly into it. So perhaps it is rising or setting. How long had he been asleep?

"Awake," a voice said softly from the corner of the room, startling Hannibal. He jolted back into the wall, and cried out in pain as his stitches pulled.

There, sitting in a mismatched chair that might have belonged to the captain of a colonial vessel, sat a young man. He had a dark mop of curly hair, and his skin was pale.

This must be his saviour, Hannibal realised quickly, even if he didn't know why he would have been saved. This young man looked nothing like any smuggler or pirate he had encountered.

"Yes, I'm awake," Hannibal replied, "I take it I have you to thank for that?"

When he began to sit further up in the bed, the young man jolted, moving as far back as the space would allow him, flinching away.

"I won't hurt you," Hannibal reassured him, then placed a hand over his fresh bandage, "I couldn't even if I wanted to. And I don't want to, I assure you."

The young man let out a huff of a breath, perhaps frustration or annoyance, though it didn't seem aimed at Hannibal. Perhaps he was mad at his own instinctive reaction?

"Thank you," Hannibal tried again, "for rescuing me."

"Even Stevens," the young man replied, a stern tone as he glared at Hannibal.

"What did you say?" Hannibal tilted his head, curious. Such an odd expression, and one that he didn't understand in this context.

The young man moved slowly, resting his hands on his thighs, on torn britches, as he continued to stare at Hannibal. Then he made a cutting motion with one hand, as though slicing down his leg. "We're even."

Hannibal swallowed.

"I know you, don't I," it wasn't really a question. There was recognition there, and a memory that was floating just out of reach.

The young man huffed again, this time the look in his piercing blue eyes made clear it was aimed at Hannibal. He stood and strode from the cabin, out the door before Hannibal even had chance to get up from the bed.

He struggled to push and pull himself until he was on his feet, stumbling after his rescuer, not stopping when he heard a splash. He reached the door and could see at the edge of the decking was a pile of clothes.

With a frown, Hannibal stepped as close to the edge as he dared, given that he was still unsteady on his feet, and peered over.

There, in the water below, he could see a tail. A large, beautiful tail swirling just under the surface. And then it was gone, causing a tiny funnel as it sucked water after it.

"Wait--" Hannibal started. He lowered himself to the deck and shuffled to the edge, peering down until--

"Aghhh," with a cry, Hannibal fell backwards onto his ass, as the creature launched itself out of the water. Before his eyes, it propelled itself upwards, great tail undulating as it forced its way through the air, curved over backwards, arching as he dove back into the water, slicing through it like a hot knife through butter- there was barely even a splash.

Hannibal's breath caught in his chest and words came out on the exhale, "my sea boy…"

He leaned further over, trying to see where the merman had gone. But as he did so, he felt the edge of the decking split, a small piece of wood splintering away into the water. Unfortunately it was the piece Hannibal was leaning on, and within moments, he was tumbling into the water below, hoping it was as deep as it seemed, or he'd likely find himself flattened on the flooded cave floor.

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Hannibal opened his eyes and felt like he was being suspended. Hitting the water had disoriented him, and now he wasn't sure which way was up. He was deep, there had to be a well beneath the drop, and thankfully he hadn't hit solid rock.

As his wits slowly came back to him, he realised the direness of his situation. He tried to remain calm, but even so, was desperate as he looked around him for any sign of which way was up.

His chest grew tight and he began to kick out, hoping he was going upwards, hoping buoyancy would take him and carry him the rest of the way. But, with his injury, he didn't have the strength he needed. He tried harder, the last air in his lungs expelled in bubbles, and then--

Hands cupped his face and then there were familiarly cold lips against his. His vision was filled with curls adorned with a multitude of green seaweed, blue eyes gazed into his and then closed.

He could breathe.

He didn't know how, but the kiss sent air into his lungs even though he didn't feel the sea boy breath.

Arms circled over his shoulders, and Hannibal automatically slid his own arms around the man's slight waist. Bodies pressed together, he could feel the effortless propulsion of the long tail that extended below them, taking them both to the surface.

When they broke the water, Hannibal found he had no need to gasp for air, and yet he did so automatically, as any human would. The sea boy did not, he just floated there, pulling slightly back, his arms gripping so that he was holding Hannibal up in the water. It was only the slightest disturbance of the water below them that betrayed quite how much effort the sea boy was putting into swishing his tail in order to keep them at the surface.

Once Hannibal had caught his breath, the sea boy stretched out onto his back and pulled Hannibal with him, swimming to the edge of the deep pool, until Hannibal was able to reach out and take hold of the rocks.

"Thank you," Hannibal muttered. His mind was still trying to make sense of it all.

Over the years, he'd half convinced himself that he had imagined that night. The sea boy, the harpy knife… the kiss. And now here was the proof before him.

"I can't believe we have met again," Hannibal shook his head, looking over the young man's beautiful face, now completely clear in the sunlight that spilled in through the mouth of the cafe. He couldn't help but reach up to push some of the curls back from the sea boy's face, but he flinched away at that, and let Hannibal go. He moved backwards, putting some distance between them as Hannibal climbed up onto the rocks and sat with his feet still dangling into the water.

"I told you, I won't hurt you."

The sea boy frowned and came a little closer but still out of grasp. "I know," he replied quietly. "I think. But, that is not true of all humans." The boy looked at him as he pushed hair from his shoulder and rubbed over a scar. When he moved his hand, Hannibal could see it was the size and shape of a harpoon.

It made Hannibal's chest ache.

“I’m so sorry you have ever been caused pain. By anyone. But I promise you never will at my hand. Nor anyone else’s whilst I’m around.”

At that the sea boy’s mouth split into a toothy smile, “You can’t even save yourself from water, what good are you to me?”

The young man chuckled, and it was magical. Hannibal’s chest swelled as he chuckled too.

“True. Though, when not under attack from pirates, I make an excellent sailor,” he defended himself.

The sea boy’s smile wavered and the tinge of blue-green on his skin became darker on his cheeks. “Yes, I know,” he replied, quietly. “I like watching you.”

Hannibal found his own cheek’s burning at the words and he tilted his head. “You watch me?”

“Now and then,” there was an attempt at nonchalance, but it didn’t quite hit the mark. The sea boy cleared his throat. “I followed lots of boats after I met you. I learned your language from listening to sailors. And then you came back to the sea, and every time, I would stay close. To… be close.”

Hannibal swallowed, “I… wish I’d known.”

“It’s best not to be seen,” the sea boy continued. “I learned that lesson when I was young, after I met you. I got close too many times and what my people had said was true - humans were not as kind as meeting you had led me to believe.”

“I’m sorry for that. Sorry that anyone hurt you.”

The sea boy kicked off with a shrug and swam a little circle before coming back to him, coming right up to the rocks now and pulling himself up so that he could rest his crossed arms on them.

“They said I was foolish for wanting to see you again,” such a quiet voice now.

“Your people?”

The sea boy nodded. “Interacting with humans is not allowed. I was reprimanded after I met you, and I kept it secret that I watched you. For years. But then one day they found me out, and when I said I would not stop watching over you on the sea, I was made to leave. I came here.” He nodded, indicating the cave.

“Oh,” Hannibal’s heart cracked in his chest, or so it felt. It felt as though his blood had run cold and was pooling in his stomach.

What could he say? That he wished the sea boy had never spoken to him, had never started watching him? Had never saved him? Had never given his people reason to shun him? There was nothing he could do to change the past and so any words along those lines were wasted.

Instead, he pushed off the rock and dropped back into the water, so that he was floating next to the sea boy. The water was warm against his naked skin.

“I’m sorry you’ve been alone,” He said, earnestly. “I wish I’d been put to the sea sooner, so that we could have been reunited all the earlier.”

The sea boy's cheeks darkened again and he looked like he might shy away, so Hannibal moved in quickly, pressing his lips to the merman's, kissing him soundly.

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Hannibal had stayed in the water until the sun had moved to a point where it no longer kept the water warmed. They kissed more, splashed about, played like children. Hannibal delighted in the way the boy swarm circles around him, or would dive deep and then launch himself again, spinning in the air before slicing back through the water.

He was a majestic creature, even more beautiful than Hannibal had remembered, more beautiful than he could have ever dreamed.

He was starting to get cold by the time he climbed the rocks and started back towards the cabin perched further up. It was an easy climb, thankfully, but Hannibal was exhausted and his side ached. By the time he reached the cabin, he was shivering - naked, but for the wet bandages.

"Humans are very fragile," the voice came from the doorway and Hannibal turned to see the young man there. He looked human now, but for the blue-green shade of his skin, and…

Naked as the merman was, Hannibal's eyes couldn't help but take in the whole of him, and that included the young man's penis. It seemed flaccid, but it was hard to tell as it looked nothing much like a human penis at all. It was tapered, longer than it was thick. Probably similar to a sea mammal, Hannibal realised.

He didn't seem to mind his own nudity, and didn't look the least bit cold. Hannibal wondered if he were only dressed earlier in anticipation of human sensibilities. Certainly, it might have been a much more awkward conversation had he been sat there naked.

The sea boy walked to Hannibal and with intent began to remove the wet bandage. "You need to be dry. Humans are not suited to the water."

Hannibal let the boy unwrap him with no expectation, certainly he was very business-like. Once fully naked, Hannibal was towelled off with a blanket and then made to lay on the bed, where the boy redressed his wound with dry bandages. Only then were the covers pulled up over him.

And by then, Hannibal was exhausted, and sleep quickly claimed him.

*

Hannibal woke a few hours later, everything was pitch, so he knew it had to be deep into the night now. He quickly realised there was a body laying next to him, atop the blankets but spooned to his back. He could feel this strange mixture of cold and hot - the warmth of another body, but the coolness of the merman's flesh.

He sank back against the body, letting sleep take him once more as he felt the comfort of it. Of this situation - something that he had never realised he always wanted and yet somehow knew would always happen. He had known since that first day it was inevitable. Since that first kiss, he now knew, their fates would be forever entwined.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Hannibal has to choose what life he is to lead.

Three Months Later

Hannibal sat at the mouth of the cave, the tide high, as he held onto the rather old, but strong rod. It tugged and he tugged back, starting to reel in the catch. It was big, and he had to fight to pull it from the surface. Hannibal was pleased with the huge fish, until Will too sprang up in the water next to him, an even larger catch between his teeth.

Hannibal sighed and cut his catch loose.

“What is the point of me trying to help provide around here, if you always outdo me?”

Will just smiled and threw his catch up onto the rocks for Hannibal to take. It was minus a chunk which Will was now chewing. Hannibal huffed.

He had long since lost count of the number of days he had been here with Will. From those first few tentative days where they shared their histories and sweet kisses. To the way they naturally and comfortably lay in each other's arms at night in the cabin, spending days creating a home of the cave.

Before Hannibal, Will had no human name and Hannibal was unable to pronounce the strange dolphin-like sounds that was his real name. So he took his name from one of the small number of books in the cabin - one by William Wordsworth, as Will liked the sound of the name and was amused that he was a writer called Wordsworth.

Hannibal placed the fish in the basket he had next to him and then stood. He stretched, and didn’t miss how Will watched him as he did so.

They were no strangers to each other's naked bodies, Hannibal fully naked now that his scar was healed. And yet, other than gentle kisses, and the occasional soft touch, they had not been intimate in the way Hannibal was growing every day to want all the more. The blush on Will’s cheeks when Hannibal looked down at him, made Hannibal sure it was something Will wanted too.

He picked up the basket and started back along the edge of the cave towards the cabin. He heard the splashing behind him as Will drew himself from the water, it would take a few minutes before his tail seemed to melt away into human legs. Though he had the same penis whether human or merman, Hannibal had noted, and tried not to dwell on. For when he did he found his own member filling, swelling with want.

He pushed the thought from his mind. What they had here was more. More than something physical. It was a deep, all-encompassing love that grew every day.

“Of course,” Hannibal said as he walked, “You do have something of an advantage. It will be different once I finish the boat. I’ll be able to get further out, as you do.”

He had found what was left of a small rowboat as he’d been exploring the parts of the cave accessible to him. And using any of the washed up wood that would hold water, he had been patching it up, after a fashion. He was not a shipwright and it was not a pretty vessel, but it would suffice to paddle out beyond the mouth of the cave to fish.

Or, if he was honest, to spend more time with Will whilst they both fished together.

He looked back to see that Will was smiling.

It took a little over a week to finally finish the boat, and Will - in human form - helped him get it out of the mouth of the cave so that they might fish together.

And for a few days, they did.

Will would swim ahead as Hannibal rowed to where the schools of fish were plentiful, and together they filled the bucket in the boat.

Sometimes Hannibal would jump in and swim with Will. If what Hannibal did could be called swimming when compared to Will.

And in the water, Will was more affectionate. More physical. Perhaps he was more comfortable in his true form, he certainly was more graceful. He wrapped himself around Hannibal and nuzzled into his neck. And sometimes they might kiss, sometimes it was less chaste than others, and all the time Hannibal wondered if they might go further.

As they swam together, the sun getting lower behind them, Hannibal pulled Will close to him and pressed their lips together. It was beautiful, a beautiful evening and Will was beautiful. The kiss was beautiful.

“Will,” Hannibal gasped as Will pulled away. “Kiss me.”

Will hesitated and then surged forward, his arms around Hannibal’s neck. They kissed deeply, hard against each other.

Hannibal was so lost in the kiss that he was dazed when Will suddenly pulled back once more, a sharp and unexpected movement. Hannibal’s eyes fluttered open and Will was looking away. Hannibal followed his line of sight to see what it was that had taken Will’s attention from him. He saw Will’s ears twitch, though he couldn’t hear anything over the usual lap of the waves.

And then he saw it. Something on the waves - a shape set out against the setting sun.

Hannibal let go of Will and swam back to the rowboat. As he pulled himself back up into it, he could see it better - finally making out the shape coming closer to them. A ship, flying his father’s standard.

Hannibal hesitated, torn.

He could admit that in these many weeks with Will he had barely thought of a place beyond the cave. He had mourned for friends inevitably lost in the attack, but nothing further. No consideration to the life on land he had left behind. It was a life he had never been fully connected to.

And now, here was a ship flying his father's heraldry, and it brought him back to reality.

He looked down at the water, but Will was gone. He had to make this choice alone.

Hannibal hesitated, longer this time, but then he raised a hand to wave at the ship, cupping the other next to his mouth as he called out ahoy.

On its current course, the ship would sail close enough that it would be impossible to miss him. So he settled, sitting in the boat, calling Will's name.

And with every minute the ship drew closer, but Will did not return.

Two Months Later

Hannibal woke in the soft sheets and even softer mattress and felt unbalanced. He had not known a good night's sleep since leaving the narrow bed of the cabin in the cave. He missed the dampness in the air, the roughness of the blankets and the stiffness of the mattress. He missed Will curled against him, that cold skin over heated blood.

He missed Will so deeply that he felt a daily stab of pain at every thought of him.

And yet, as the weeks passed, he once more had the same thoughts he'd had before being reunited - a concern that Will was in fact not real. Just a figment of his imagination. A childish imagining turned adult hallucination under the pressure of being stranded at sea.

He tried to shake those thoughts away, but with none willing to believe him any more now than they had when he was a child, it was too easy to question the reality of it all.

"You need to be up, Hannibal," the stern voice of his mother filled his room a moment before she did - coming in without knocking nor invitation. A sheepish looking maid followed behind her with a breakfast tray. Once it was set at the small table by the window, she curtsied and quickly removed herself. His mother did not.

"Guests will begin arriving in the afternoon, as you well know. Get up, eat, bathe. Your valet has already laid out your clothes for this afternoon, as well as your outfit for the ball this evening. All you need do is be present in body even if not in mind, if that's not too much to ask." It wasn't a question and there was no other option, that much was clear.

His parents had been glad to welcome him home, primarily to have their heir returned to them. He had barely missed them when he'd been away, and he now knew the same was true in return. They had always been distant - both aloof, Hannibal had mostly been raised by nannies and the household staff. It was the title that mattered more to his parents than family, and had they been able to have more children, they would have done so to ensure their line continued should any calamity befall.

When Hannibal showed no signs of responding, his mother huffed and left the room, replaced in short order by his valet.

He missed the cave. Only Will for company, no concern for clothes, let alone the fineries required for a ball.

A ball at which he was to find a wife.

“Your father wishes to see you in his study once you are ready, m’lord.” The valet told him as Hannibal finally rose from the bed. He had a few bites of breakfast, his appetite so small these days, and then washed. After the valet had helped him dress, he did as he was told - his father’s son, not a man grown.

“Father,” Hannibal addressed the older man as he looked out his window, viewing the vast Lecter Estate.

“I want no fuss this evening, Hannibal,” his father said, not turning to look upon him. “You have made your feelings perfectly clear about it, but it is happening. Tonight you will find a match, there is no other choice.”

Hannibal huffed, feeling like he was being talked to as he had been twenty years ago - when he had been a child.

“I have no interest in marriage,” Hannibal said, pointlessly he knew. He had already said this many times. But now he added, “especially to a woman.”

At that his father turned and glared at him.

“You don’t need to prefer women to marry one,” the words were cold. “You simply need to produce an heir on her. Happiness is not necessary, in fact, it’s discouraged if it will bring disrepute upon our family name.”

Of course, that was all that mattered.

“Yes, sir.” Hannibal replied through grit teeth, knowing there was no point in arguing. “I’m going to go get some fresh air.”

“Be back within the hour, I want to make sure you’re here to greet our guests. I would like you to make a good impression on them.”

Hannibal didn’t answer, he simply turned and left the room.

*

He hadn’t intended to take a whole hour, and he hadn’t intended to leave the estate, but he’d found himself leaving via one of the trails behind the house and walking towards the docks. It had taken almost an hour just to do that, and when he got there, he simply found he did not care.

Hannibal had never been happier than when he was at sea, and now he realised how unbearably mundane his life on land was. Those months he spent sailing with Jack’s crew he came to life, but back on his father’s estate he had only gone through the motions.

He wasn’t sure if it was being away for so long, or spending that time with Will, that suddenly pushed everything into sharp contrast. He had never before realised how miserable he was. And now, as his family waited for him, and together they would wait for the guests - amongst whom Hannibal was to choose a bride - he knew he could no longer abide it.

To his father it seemed so simple - that he should forgo happiness for the family name, but Hannibal had now tasted that happiness and he could not let it go.

Hannibal didn't miss the looks of the sailors and merchants as he walked amongst them in his finery. And yet, he knew he was more one of them than anything resembling his father.

"Oh, Will. I should never have left you," Hannibal muttered at the sea as he reached the end of the dock and looked over at the water.

"Hannibal?" The small voice came from behind him and he turned so quickly he almost lost his balance. There were arms around him then to hold him fast - no, just to hold him.

"Will? Will, Will…" Hannibal repeated over and over before pulling back to look at the young man. "How… Why…"

He could barely form words as the merman in his human form stood before him. He looked smaller somehow - cowed into human life. He wore the worn clothes of a sailor and smelled like one too. His curls were cut short, the seaweed and other sea ornaments that once graced them were gone too.

"I shouldn't have fled when I saw the ship," Will said quickly, "You left because I fled--"

"No!" Hannibal cut him off, not caring for the stares as he cupped Will's face in his hands and kissed his forehead. "I shouldn't have come back here. I saw my father's flag and felt guilt, felt that I couldn't have them believe that I died. But now… Oh Will, now I wish I had because leaving you was the worst thing that I have ever known."

Will rested his head on Hannibal's shoulder and they held each other close once more.

"I will not make the same mistake this time. I will tell them that I do not plan to return. I can have no life without you." He pulled back enough to find Will's lips and kissed him passionately. They kissed and clung to each other until a bellowed voice came from behind them.

"My lord!"

That broke them apart and Hannibal looked back to see his valet and another servant from the estate. Up on dry land stood one of his father's carriages.

"Your father sent us to look for you," his valet's words were firm but hesitant, clearly he was unsure of this unexpected situation.

"Then take us to him," Hannibal replied just as firmly. He took Will's hand in his and walked back along the docks.

*

The journey was quicker by carriage than it had been on foot, but still enough time for Hannibal to learn that Will had reemerged to see Hannibal leaving and had followed him. But once here he only knew how to fish, and whilst hiding as a human, he had not anticipated the social barriers that had kept them apart.

Hannibal's heart broke for each time Will said he had tried to see him only to be turned away by servants on the estate.

"I never knew," Hannibal's words were choked from a tight throat. "No one ever told me."

He knew that had anyone even bothered to mention it to his father, the elder Lecter would have known that this was a lover, and would have had the servants ignore him. That much was clear to Hannibal now. His father knew he could never be happy with a woman, and that mattered not a jot.

When the carriage pulled up at the house, Hannibal was tempted to have Will wait for him, but given the stories he'd just recounted, Hannibal didn't want to risk Will being sent away. So instead, he took Will's hand and they entered the house.

Guests were due any moment now and the grand foyer awaited them with servants ready with drinks and appetisers.

Hannibal paid them no mind as he walked through to his father's study, but his father was storming towards them before they got half way there - the servants worked quickly to spread information when they wanted to.

"What is the meaning of this!" the Count shouted, and Hannibal felt Will quiver. When he looked over at him he saw determination, not fear, his lips pulled back slightly to reveal his sharp teeth.

It seems Will was no longer wary of humans, he was something else entirely. Something potentially lethal.

"I wanted to tell you, so that you do not worry," the words sounded hollow even to his ears. "So that you do not come looking for me. I am leaving, with Will."

He pulled Will's hand to his mouth and kissed the back of it.

"You degenerate welp," the Count growled at Hannibal. He moved forward so quickly that neither he or Will were prepared when he grabbed Will by the scruff of his shirt and began hauling him back to the foyer.

Will's hand slipped from Hannibal's and the house seemed suddenly consumed in commotion.

"Father!" Hannibal protested even as the first guests began to walk through the door.

Now his father stood in the middle of the foyer, guests before him and his angered son behind him, and a writhing, angry creature in his grasp.

Hannibal swallowed, coming to a halt as he watched the trousers Will wore start to rip. As they peeled from him, scales emerged and along with it a long, lashing tail.

Will dropped to the floor, with no legs to support him, and this tore him from the Count's grasp. Several of the guests screamed in horror and others were dumbstruck into silence. All watched as that great muscle of a tail whipped around struck the Count.

It wasn't as violent a strike as it could have been, but it was enough to knock the man on his ass and send him across the floor.

Hannibal rushed forward to Will's side even as Will pulled himself frighteningly quickly across the polished floor until he loomed over his father's prone form.

He might have been threatening, but Hannibal was unsure, as the sounds were not words, but Will's natural, dolphin-like language.

“Will,” Hannibal crouched next to him, “he’s not worth any pains.”

Hannibal had never seen his father look terrified, and yet now he was as white as a sheet and trembling.

Hannibal scooped Will up into his arms, carrying him like a new bride towards the doors as the small crowd parted before them. There was nothing in this place he needed, he would take only what he could carry, and that was Will.

“Hannibal?” his mother’s voice was soft, as it had been on occasion during his childhood.

He turned to look at her and saw the pain in her eyes. And for one moment he was sure, it wasn’t just the pain of losing an heir, or the shame and embarrassment. It was something more - it was the loss of a child, the loss of the opportunity to be a parent that child had needed but no longer did.

“Goodbye,” She said just as softly, a small smile for him.

“Goodbye mother,” Hannibal replied.

*

Hannibal had used his father’s credit to acquire a boat, and with Will swimming alongside it, they were at the cave in two days. He tied off the boat at the mouth of the cave and made his way back to the cabin that had become his home.

Their home.

He was at the cabin door when he heard Will approaching behind him.

“I’d have never found my way back here without you,” Hannibal said, his voice strained with emotion. He turned to see Will standing there, wet with the sea water and naked as always. He reached out and ran his fingers through Will’s shorter hair. “Thank you for coming to find me.”

Will surged forward and their mouths met.

Hannibal was instantly hard. He had longed for this, he had missed this. To be back with Will again, back in their own little world and the intimacy therein. He didn’t care if Will wanted nothing more physical than this, he would take it. He just needed Will.

“Can I…” Will was breathless as he pulled back from Hannibal’s arms even as he half-pushed him towards their bed.

“What Will? What do you want?”

“I want to mount you,” Will replied, an edge of timidness in his tone. “I’ve always wanted you. But I don’t want to hurt you… human bodies--”

“I want that too, Will.”

Hannibal walked them the rest of the way to the bed and started to pull off his damp clothes. He had been with a few men once his tastes had become apparent to himself. He knew what was needed to make this work.

“We need oil,” Hannibal muttered as he let his britches drop and then pressed himself against Will.

Will shook his head, “No… I… my kind…” he took Hannibal’s hand and moved it to his own hard length, it was silky soft and somewhat prehensile, and as Hannibal stroked it he felt the slick pre-ejaculate coat his palm. It wasn’t like a human, less sticky, allowing more of a glide as he worked Will with his hand.

“Yes,” Hannibal breathed against Will’s neck, “I think this would do. But… I want to see you…”

Hannibal pulled away and laid down on the bed, lying back into the pillows and spreading his legs.

Will let out a shuddering breath and climbed between Hannibal’s thighs. He leaned in and they kissed as deeply as they ever had, all the while Hannibal used his now slicked fingers to press at his hole. He relaxed and the muscle gave quickly and easily, allowing him to push in some of Will’s slick spend on two fingers.

“Please, please Will…” Hannibal begged as the merman writhed against him, their cocks pressed together as even more slickness gathered.

Will pressed his forehead to Hannibal’s and he could feel Will’s cock moving of its own accord. Will adjusted his hips and then the tapered tip was pushing inside him.

“Will!” Hannibal cried out his pleasure as he felt the soft slide of Will inside him. Will braced himself above Hannibal and began to thrust, slow at first, testing the human body beneath him. But as his confidence grew in not breaking Hannibal, so did his thrusts. Until--

“Hannibal… Hannibal… I can’t… I have to…”

Whatever it was, Hannibal wanted it. As he felt Will swell and pulse inside him with every slide against that pleasure centre within him, he knew he wanted everything Will could give him.

Will let out a sound in his own language as his body shook.

The first thing Hannibal noticed was the rough graze against his thighs and it took a moment for his mind to realise what the sensation was. Scales rubbed against him, almost chaffing as Will’s thrusts got harder, deeper.

Hannibal might almost call them violent but for the fact that there was no violence behind them. It was simply Will - how his kind were.

Hannibal looked down and could see Will’s tail curled as tight as possible and thrusting him forward over and over. The strength of it was undeniable.

“Does it hurt… Hannibal…” There was a note of pleading, of dire concern.

Hannibal cupped Will’s face in his hands. “No, no Will. It’s perfect, it’s beautiful. Keep going… fill me with your seed.”

Will let out a groan and then his mouth found Hannibal’s once more in a biting kiss that drew a little blood from Hanibal’s lower lip.

They rocked together on the bed, the creaking of it echoed in the wood beneath them so that Hannibal - in the very back of his mind - wondered whether it was more likely for the bed to break

or the floor itself.

When he felt Will's rhythm stutter, and the cock within him swell and undulate, Hannibal took hold of himself and stroked, over and over until he was so close to climax that it was painful to hold back. Another stroke and he was coming, every muscle in his body going taut with pleasure.

With a screeching cry in his language, Will threw his head back and pressed himself deep into Hannibal, drawing back once more before thrusting so hard back into him that Hannibal was pressed as far up the bed as he could go. Will continued to grind into him and Hannibal felt spill after spill inside him. He felt his own cock continue to throb in pleasure as his belly distended, full of Will's copious spend.

It felt so good that his cock pulsed again, managing another weak spurt. He groaned and shivered, his body going lax as each muscle relaxed.

When Will began to cautiously pull back, Hannibal pulled him close once more.

"No, not yet… let me feel you. Stay inside me."

Those words caused another throb inside him and Will spilled again. Hannibal might have laughed had he not been so lost to the pleasure of it.

As they both finally came down from their climaxes, they curled against each other, Will's tail twisting around Hannibal's legs as the merman's ejaculate began to flow out of him and onto the sheets that they would no doubt need to change.

"Perhaps next time," Hannibal muttered sleepily, "in the water."

He felt Will move and opened his eyes to find Will staring at him, a small frown knitting his brow.

"You don't know what you ask for." Will replied.

Hannibal cocked his head, "What do I ask for?"

"There is a legend among my people, that to mate with a human in the water will… they will become merfolk."

Hannibal blinked and then a smile broke, wide.

Forty Years Later

"Don't go bothering them," the sailor cuffed the ear of the cabin boy as they stood next to each other at the gunwall.

"I wasn't," the youngster protested. "I just wanted to see."

"Well, you know, my grandfather was a sailor and you know what he told me?"

The boy shook his head, eyes wide with interest.

"It is a lucky thing to see merfolk. But it's how you treat them that decides whether it's bad luck, or good luck."

The boy smiled and up at the older sailor and back down at the water. As the two mermen swam alongside the boat, in and out of the waves, and in and out of each other as they twinned together and apart, like some intricate dance, he was sure that seeing them was definitely good luck.

Maybe one day he might see one his own age, he might meet a boy from the sea in person.

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